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By-Saxe, Richard W.

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To examine current communication and involvement patterns between municipal and educational governments in urban areas, a questionnaire was mailed to mayors of the nation's 50 largest cities. Responses to the questionnaires indicated that (1) incoming and outgoing communications about local school issues normally flow through the school superintendent's office, (2) incoming communications concerning State and national school issues are normally received through the news media, and (3) outgoing communications concerning State and national school issues are generally sent to State and national public officials. Most of the respondents (88%) indicated that communication about local school issues was satisfactory, and approximately one-half of the respondents rated State and national school communications as satisfactory. Sixty-two percent of the mayors expressed a desire to increase their involvement in school issues. These and other results indicate that a majority of the responding mayors feel the need for closer educational-political cooperation. (JH)

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Of A Survey Of
The Mayors Of The
Fifty Largest Cities
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In Educational Issues

January 1969

By Richard W. Saxe

Department of Educational
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# MAYORS AND SCHOOLS

By Richard W. Saxe*

Myths have an enduring quality about them which permits them to endure long after the conditions which brought them into being have changed. We do not have a viable procedure for undoing the conditioning processes of generations of exposure and unquestioned acceptance of the myth.

We have our share of myths concerning education and one of these is that schools should be apolitical--somehow they are a creature of some kind of government yet must be outside of the usual processes of political action. The reasons we needed to create this myth are well known to most of us over 30.

In historical perspective we can see why the myth of outside of politics was necessary. Until about 1827 education was but another aspect of local government.[1] The arrival of professional school administrators and the problems of increasing size brought about the creation of quasi-legal districts and the separation of the governance of education from other aspects of local government. Schoolmen, usually with good reason, have resisted attempts to permit mayors and other local officials to intervene in school matters considered "professional"--curriculum, personnel policies, teaching practices, and the like. Governmental officials did not always honor the no-tresspassing notices of educators and the resulting scandals greatly strengthened the notion that schools and politics or perhaps schools and politicians should not "mix."[2]

This arrangement worked reasonably well for a time but the increased importance of the schools to the larger society and the general lack of responsiveness

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*Professor of Educational Administration and Supervision and Assistant Dean, College of Education, University of Toledo.

of school governors to the needs and demands of that society have brought new pressures on school men and governmental officials. School administrators found it increasingly necessary to become knowledgeable about and involved in the usual political processes at all levels of government. In a few short years we have seen almost a complete reversal of the position that educators should remain aloof from political action. Indeed, it is now a mark of virtue and an indication of increased competence for administrators and teachers to acquire expertise in various aspects of the political process.[3] At this institution one of the commonly selected areas of concentration for doctoral candidates in school administration is political science and teachers and administrators alike flock to courses or workshops on collective negotiations.

So school administrators have quietly arrived at a new consensus that they may and must engage in political action in order to secure the necessary support and approval for their enterprise. But what of the other side of the coin, the other partners to the old arrangement--the local governmental officials, the mayors, councilmen *et alia*? It would be strange if they, too, did not detect the same pressures to alter their "hands off" stance in order to accomodate the new social forces.

The politicians, if I may now use that term in order to differentiate mayors and other officials from school people, have been slower to acknowledge the changing relationship. This is not surprising if we recall that almost invariably they, the politicians, were proclaimed the villains in cases of improper procedures over the years. Because of this background and perhaps because his interest was not kindly received by educators, the politician has continued to give lip service to the separation of powers position. But this position has become most difficult to maintain. If a school issue threatens the continuance of his administration, and it often does, the politician must observe the first law of politics and deal with the issue in order to remain in office or, if seeking office, to get elected.

However, even in the face of strong pressures the politician is reluctant to act. Often he finds an acceptable rationale in response to the need to exercise his

broad police powers in the interest of public safety. We find this happening in the wake of student disorders, often after athletic contests. Clearly this is not enough intervention to protect his office, but we can expect this to be the first sign of a changing relationship. It suggests how well politicians were conditioned to their once new role. In a sense it is akin to the initial post-Sputnick Federal interest in education. The purpose was to protect us by encouraging the necessary programs in the schools. Remember the title was the National Defense Education Act.

Quite naturally the mayor of New York City has been a pioneer in seeking to create a better relationship between City Hall and Livingston Street. New York City has experienced all of the new pressures and more due to its size and social structure. (Actually the governor has been involved in efforts to solve school problems in New York City but we cannot deal with the changing role of the state in this paper.) An early sign of this interest was the appointment to the mayor's staff of a professional to act somewhat as an ambassador to education.[4]

This brief discussion has been intended to establish the general background of the problem. The task as we see it is to bring about a more meaningful relationship between municipal government and educational government in the same or in closely related areas. The accidents of history and various patterns of creating school districts make for one type of problem in that the school district may include more than the city or only a portion of the city. This is another problem. The issue which concerns us is the reluctance of politicians to become openly and intelligently involved in coordination and cooperation with those charged with the responsibility of providing an educational program and attendant services.

To support or refute the preceding argument a survey of the mayors of the 50 largest cities was made during July and August, 1968. A form was designed to determine the attitude of the mayors toward becoming more involved in educational matters. It was our general hypothesis that there would be evidence of a trend toward

increased involvement, that this would be represented by efforts to establish new channels of communication. We also predicted that initial overt involvement by politicians would be in areas concerned with safety and welfare rather than those concerned with educational content or personnel.

## The Instrument

Data for this investigation were gathered by a three page questionnaire requesting information about communication about school issues in and out of the mayor's office and, finally his comments and predictions. In addition, respondents were asked to assess the adequacy of the communication process as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory. A one page cover letter accompanied the form. Anonymity was promised to those requesting it.

## Findings

Returns were of three types: the complete form, the one page follow-up form, and letters. The letters were of two types, those which provided substantial data in a different format and two which were for the sole purpose of explaining why the respondent could not cooperate in the survey. Hence for some purposes our N is 42, while for others it may be 18 or 33. The returns are broken down in this manner:

| | |
|---|---|
| Complete 3 page form | 18 |
| One-page follow-up form | 15 |
| Letters including data | 7 |
| Letters declining participation | 2 |
| Additional letters supplementing the forms | 4 |
| Total cities responding | 42 |
| Not responding | 8 |

The best way to present the data from the complete forms is a series of tables. This same procedure can be used for one item from the final section concerning future trends. The tables will be followed by an analysis of letters and comments from all respondents.

The data for tables 1, 2, and 3 were elicited by open ended stems such as: "Information about local school issues is usually supplied to me by:" The data for table 4, 5, and 6 were stimulated by a stem such as: "The person(s) with whom I communicate to make known the mayor's position about local school issues is/are usually:"

TABLE 1

Sources of Incoming Communication

About Local School Issues to Mayors

| Source | Number of Mayors Reporting |
|---|---|
| Local School Superintendent or Staff[a] | 10 |
| Member or Officer of School Board | 6 |
| Press and Communication Media | 5 |
| Community Associations--all | 2 |
| Mayor's Staff | 2 |
| Individual Entries[b] | 13 |
| Total Responding to this Item | 18 |

[a]Two respondents listed staff members.

[b]Sources listed only once were: American Federation of Teachers, City Controller, City Planning Commission, City Council, Department of Education, Teachers Associations, Human Relations Committee, Personal Information, Minutes of Board Meetings, City Department Heads, School Board through the City Manager, Public, City Manager.

TABLE 2

Sources of Incoming Communication

About State School Issues to Mayors

| Source | Number Reporting |
|---|---|
| Press, Communication Media | 9 |
| School Superintendent | 5 |
| Mayor's Staff | 3 |
| Legislature | 3 |
| State Office of Education | 2 |
| City Legislative Representative | 2 |
| Budget Director | 2 |
| Individual Entries[a] | 6 |
| Total Responding to Item | 18 |

[a]Sources cited only once were: State Superintendent, Mail, Municipal League Newsletter, School Board through City Manager, Public, Governor's Office.

TABLE 3

Sources of Incoming Communication

About National School Issues to Mayors

| Source | Number Reporting |
|---|---|
| News Media | 12 |
| School Superintendent | 3 |
| National League of Cities | 2 |
| U. S. Office of Education | 2 |
| Mayor's Staff | 2 |
| Individual Entries[a] | 11 |

[a]Sources listed only once were: Personal Reading Efforts; Department of Education; Congressional Delegation; Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; Conference of Mayors; Private and Semi-Private National Organizations; School Board through the City Manager; Not Usually Supplied; Local Board of Education; Public; State Board of Education.

TABLE 4

Sources of Outgoing Communication

About Local School Issues From Mayors

| Source | Number Reporting |
|---|---|
| Superintendent | 12 |
| School Board[a] | 11 |
| Press, Communication Media | 4 |
| Staff of Board of Education | 2 |
| City Manager | 2 |
| Individual Entries[b] | 3 |
| Total Responding to This Item | 17 |

[a]Includes officers, members, and one entry of "board members who are personal friends."

[b]Sources listed only once were: Human Relations Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Response to Those Who Contact Me.

TABLE 5

Sources of Outgoing Communication

About State School Issues From Mayors

| Source | Number Reporting |
|---|---|
| Governor | 5 |
| Commissioner of Education | 4 |
| Member or Leader of Legislature | 3 |
| Press, Other News Media | 2 |
| School Superintendent (Local) | 2 |
| Individual Entries[a] | 6 |
| Total Responding to Item | 14 |

[a]Sources cited only once were: Local Board of Education, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, State Officials, State Board of Education, Board of Regents, No One.

TABLE 6

Sources of Outgoing Communication

About National School Issues From Mayors

| Source | Number Reporting |
|---|---|
| Representatives | 5 |
| Senators | 3 |
| Superintendent | 2 |
| Press, Communication Media | 2 |
| No One | 2 |
| Individual Entries[a] | 4 |
| Total Responding to Item | 13 |

[a]Sources listed only once were: Educators, U. S. Office of Education, Board of Education, Respond to Those Who Contact Me.

TABLE 7

Mayors' Estimates of Adequacy

of Sources of Incoming Communication By Levels[a]

| Estimate | Level | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Local | State | National |
| Satisfactory | 14 | 8 | 7 |
| Unsatisfactory | 2 | 7 | 8 |

[a]N = 16 rated local sources, 15 rated state and national.

TABLE 8

Mayors' Estimates of Adequacy

of Sources of Outgoing Communication By

Levels[a]

| Estimate | Level | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Local | State | National |
| Satisfactory | 14 | 8 | 7 |
| Unsatisfactory | 2 | 5 | 5 |

[a]N = 16 Local, 13 State, 12 National.

TABLE 9

Probable Future Involvement

of Mayors in School Issues[a]

| Involvement | Number Reporting |
|---|---|
| Mayor Personally More Involved | 20 |
| About the Same | 11 |
| Mayor Personally Less Involved[b] | 1 |
| No Response | 1 |

[a]N = 32 Only this part of the form was sent on two follow-ups of the original complete questionnaire.

[b]This is the response of the Mayor of Honolulu who describes an atypical situation.

## Comments of Mayors

The most common comment was an explanation of structural arrangements which preclude mayors from active participation in regard to school issues. Equally frequent were statements deploring poor communication and advocating improvement. An anonymous comment is representative of this type:

> (Our) public school system is consolidated under one superintendent of schools and an elected, policy-making school board of seven members. The City Administration attempts, through its Planning Department, to keep the schools informed about city matters, such as annexation, that will have a direct bearing on school policies. Communication is open between the mayor and the superintendent of schools but on a haphazard basis.

The comment of the Mayor of Kansas City seems especially relevant to the changing conditions:

> The city government has tried to cooperate with the local school district on problems of human relations, finance and school bonds. I have to have even closer communication in the future on these and other matters. The traditional concept of a separate government for the city and the school district ignores the mutuality of interest of the two agencies and creates a gap which must be closed.

The Tulsa comment prepared by an assistant to the mayor is in the same vein:

> The Tulsa School System is a separate level of government from the Mayor's office. The Mayor's office is never considered in any decision made by the Board of Education. There is a need for dialogue between the two offices but thus far I have not had much success in establishing the necessary rapport to discuss priorities.

These two brief comments are of a type which supports our prediction that initial overt actions by mayors would deal with welfare and security. From Omaha: "The mayor has been involved in school security--not curriculum."

And from an anonymous mayor:

> "The Superintendent of Schools or his staff meet on different occasions with me and my staff. We discuss problems involving our mutual responsibilities--especially police problems at athletic events."

The other comments will be found in an appendix to this report. This procedure will permit readers to arrive at their own conclusions concerning the perceptions of the cooperating mayors.

## Letters

Although the letters provided much information,the general tendency of these was to courteously explain the tradition of separation of functious and to indicate that the writer did not intend to violate tradition. Mayor Braman of Seattle informed us that:

> We are, of course, always concerned and in constant consultation with the School Board and the School's Superintendent concerning activities that overlap between our two areas of responsibility. I do not intend however, to become involved in school issues such as curricula, bussing of students, and matters of that type, since this is clearly the responsibility of another agency, who I am sure would not appreciate my injection into their affairs any more than I would appreciate theirs into mine.

And, along the same line Mayor Loeb of Memphis put it this way:

> My frank answer is that education and politics do not mix.... on hiring policy, or on the general conduct of the elected Board handling of school matters, politicians should leave education alone and allow the elected Board of Education to do its job.

An exception to this trend among mayor's who chose to compose letters to replace or supplement our form was, as we would anticipate, New York. This statement is more representative of the trend than those pointing out the virtues of separation although they are important evidence of the pervasive,

persistent influence of the tradition of separation. Mayor Lindsey reported, in part:

1. Efforts are being made to establish a more effective system of relationships between the Board of Education and other city agencies; in the past, such problems as overlapping jurisdictions have tended to preclude full responsibility by any one agency.

2. The Board of Education is being strengthened so that it can deal more effectively with the current issues concerning public education in New York City.

3. Plans are being made to utilize the full resources of the city to promote and make a success of decentralization; top priority is being given to this effort.

4. October of last year, the Mayor's Office of Education Liaison was established to advise me on matters involving educational planning and policy decisions.

One final comment from a letter from Mayor W. W. McAllister of San Antonio may well reveal sentiments held by other, less outspoken mayors. After explaining the legal separation tradition, Mayor McAllister adds: "Expressing a personal opinion, I do not want to be saddled with the responsibility of education."

## Discussion

Hopefully the findings speak for themselves. There is clear evidence of a need and a desire for mayors to become more involved in educational issues. At the same time, we note the continuing influence of tradition which hampers efforts of politicians seeking to influence education.

Channels of communication are well nigh non-existent. One recalls Will Rogers' wry lie "All I know is what I read in the papers." Our series of tables shows the reliance of mayors on superintendents for communications in and out

on local matters, but the superintendent shares his role equally with the press in regard to state and national matters.

There seems to be an appalling lack of sources of information about state and national issues and this is noted by the incidence of unsatisfactory evaluations in tables 7 and 8. Mayors clearly feel better informed about local issues.

In general, we find our predictions supported. The myth is persistent, but powerful social forces seem to have caused a majority of the mayors cooperating in this survey (20 out of 32 reporting on the item in Table 9) to reconsider their "hands off" attitude. We cannot improve on the words of the Mayor of Kansas City "The traditional concept of a separate government for the city and the school district ignores the mutuality of interest of the two . . . ."

If this--further cooperation--is the case, and this is the way we read the data, there are serious problems awaiting the joint efforts of politicians and educators. We do not even know the ball park let alone the ground rules. Our communication is primitive and must be improved. Does it matter who makes the overtures or who takes the initiative in ~~their~~ this regard? I would hope it would be the schoolmen because they would not be so suspect as interlopers as would politicians moving in educational precincts.

It seems to this writer that, at least in the giant cities, it is academic to debate closer educational-political cooperation. Like it or not the events of the day will not permit a fragmented approach to education in the city. Our concern would better be to define and test new relationships and create channels of communication. Hopefully this can be done without repeating mistakes of the past and will result in an improved educational operation without a loss in importance of either educators or politicians.

## REFERENCES


1. Campbell, Roald F.; Corbally, John E. Jr.; and Ramseyer, John A. Introduction to Educational Administration, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1966), p. 76.

2. See, for example, National Commission for the Defense of Democracy through Education, N.E.A. Certain Personnel Practices in the Chicago Public Schools (Washington D.C.: N.E.A., 1945).

3. Current issues of the N.E.A. publication Today's Schools feature a column titled "Teachers in Politics." The trend is also evident in the several journals of state associations. Contrary findings are reported by Harmon Ziegler in his The Political Life of American Teachers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967). However, conditions have changed substantially in the period since Ziegler collected his data. We may refer to his work to support our point about the pervasive influence of the apolitical socialization of teachers.

4. In October of 1967. This entire controversy in New York must be one of the most thoroughly documented case studies of educational policy making in history. The current confrontation between community and teacher rights cannot be avoided much longer in urban centers.

## Appendix A

## RESPONDENTS

### A

### To Complete Form

Akron, Ohio
Baltimore, Maryland
Boston, Massachusetts
Buffalo, New York
Cincinnati, Ohio
Columbus, Ohio
Denver, Colorado
Fort Worth, Texas
Indianapolis, Indiana
Kansas City, Missouri
Louisville, Kentucky
Newark, New Jersey
Minneapolis, Minnesota
Norfolk, Virginia
Omaha, Nebraska
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Rochester, New York
Tulsa, Oklahoma

### B

### To One-Page, Follow-Up Form

Atlanta, Georgia
Cleveland, Ohio
Dayton, Ohio
Honolulu, Hawaii
El Paso, Texas
Jersey City, New Jersey
Long Beach, California
New Orleans, Louisiana
New York, New York
Phoenix, Arizona
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Portland, Oregon
San Francisco, California
San Diego, California
Toledo, Ohio

### C

### By Letter

Dallas, Texas
Birmingham, Alabama
Houston, Texas
Los Angeles, California
Memphis, Tennessee
Oakland, California
San Antonio, Texas
St. Louis, Missouri
Seattle Washington

Appendix B

COMMENTS OF MAYORS

(Not including letters or comments quoted in the preceding discussion: Kansas City, Omaha, Tulsa, and Anonymous).

## Baltimore

One of the themes of my administration has been to make the Department of Education and our entire public school system more responsive to public officials and to the public in general. I am enclosing a copy of my inaugural address which sets forth the theme that our school system must be "non-political" not "non-public".

I also utilize to a great extent the City Department of Planning to assist me to formulate policies and plans for the school system.

To a considerable extent, the issues, with respect to the school system, focus around the budget, both the operating budget and the capital improvement budget. Therefore to the extent that I, as Mayor, have personally tried to involve myself in the budget process, utilizing both the Department of Planning and the Department of Finance, I have also involved myself more personally and closely in school issues.

In the City of Baltimore, like other school districts, our Board of School Commissioners enjoys a certain amount of fiscal autonomy, however, we are developing, under the leadership of our new President of the School Board, Francis D. Murnaghan, Jr., and our new Superintendent, Doctor Thomas D. Sheldon, a new spirit of cooperation between school officials and other public officials, and, at the same time, developing a greater sense of responsiveness on the part of the school system to the deep social probelems within our City.

## El Paso

The City of El Paso has two very fine independent public school districts. The City and the schools work very closely together in regard to financial matters, any problems regarding integration, planning, zoning, etc. It is vitally necessary that all lines of communication be open between the Mayor's office and that of the school administration offices and this is the case in El Paso.

## Honolulu

The City and County of Honolulu, which comprises the Island of Oahu (pop. 640,000), had the responsibility of building all public schools, as requested by the State Department of Education and at sites of the State's selection. Our school building program increased in the 1955-1965 period so that school bonds accounted for more than 40 percent of the City and County's bonded indebtedness.

However, in 1965, the State Legislature passed Act 97 which transferred school building and maintenance from the City and County to the State, under the Department of Education, which directs all educational curriculum and administration throughout the State. We continued to carry out existing school building contracts, on a contractual basis with the State, until Act 103 in 1967 provided for the transfer of all school building and maintenance employees to the Department of Education.

## Jersey City

Jersey City is in midst of largest school building program in its history. Because state law fixes the school board's borrowing capacity, and because the building program has depleted that capacity, the city government has had to lend its borrowing capacity to help complete the program.

Mayor Whelan has received the cooperation of Dartmouth College in setting up a program under which Dartmouth undergraduates work in Jersey City, with community groups, to try to improve educational programs in city schools.

## Philadelphia

It seems clear that mayors will become more involved in school issues as the trend toward Regional Councils of Government continues. Statistics compiled by the National League of Cities show that many independent school districts are consolidating because this is cheaper. School operating revenues are tied directly to the local tax structure, and school expenditures must be evaluated like any other expenditure of public funds. This means the mayor and other public officials must become involved with school issues.

Here in Philadelphia the mayor and other public officials already are deeply involved in school issues, probably more so than in many other cities. This is because of our City Charter, to which the voters in 1965 added a supplement placing the appointment of School Board members in the province

of the mayor. Additionally the allocation of school funds is a responsibility of the City Council.

Currently the mayor has directed City officials to sit down with Teachers Union and School Board members in an attempt to avert an impasse in contract negotiations which could result in a teachers strike.

## Phoenix

I have set up procedures for school administrators to become more effective in seeking information from our staff on business items of concern to the school system.

I have involved the high schools in contractural arrangement with the city to help with basic adult education programs.

I shall become involved in bringing attention to the need for more Spanish speaking teachers in our elementary schools.

## Newark

Established regular monthly meetings with the Board of Education in Mayor's Office. Now seeking to establish City's new Community Development Administration as master planning agency for school rebuilding program through formal contract with the City of Newark.

## New Orleans

While the City Government certainly is interested in assuring that students receive the finest public education available, it is our policy that, inasmuch as the City Government has no jurisdiction, legal or otherwise, over the Orleans Parish School System, administered by an elected board directly responsible to the public, we do not interfere with their operations. The City Government cooperates with the School Board in every possible way, but does not and will not attempt to shape public education in public schools. Legally, in terms of the City Charter and State Constitution, the Mayor and City Government cannot do so, and we do not contemplate any change in this policy.

## Norfolk

The only authority the Council of the City of Norfolk has in the operation of the School system of our City is the appointment of the School Board and the appropriation of the

funds. After yearly appropriations are made, the Council has no authority over how these funds are spent.

## Pittsburgh

In the past the School Board has been appointed. The feeling has been from the community that the School Board should be elected.

## Portland

The City of Portland government is separate and apart from the administration of the Portland School District. He, therefore, has no power to change administrative procedures. However, he does maintain a very close relationship with the School Board and the various top superintendents and their assistants and often send them suggestions on changes that would be beneficial to the students, teachers etc.

A couple of years ago the schools budget increase was not ratified and the schools were cutting out their interscholastic athletic program. A group of citizens formed a committee and raised the money to carry it over for a year. The mayor was instrumental in putting this committee together and leading it on to victory.

Often problems arise in the city where very close cooperation is needed, as in the incidence of drug use, vandalism etc. and the City and the School District work very well together to handle these.

## Rochester

The City Council has adopted a resolution, subject to public referendum at the 1968 election general election which asks the people if the City Council should take steps to secure "fiscal independence" for the City School District of Rochester.

The Board of Education of the City of Rochester is elected at-large by the people of the City in the general municipal election. Under State law, they--and only they--are entirely responsible for the education program in the public schools of Rochester. The City Council, however, is responsible for determining the total appropriation which is to be allocated to the Board of Education and levying the school tax for the Board of Education. Other than the annual appropriation and authorization to issue bonds, the City

Council and the Mayor have no formal role to play in school affairs.

As the presiding officer of the Council, chosen by the Council for a two-year term and operating under the Council-Manager form of government, the role of the Mayor of the City of Rochester in relation to school affairs is circumscribed.

It would not be unusual for the Mayor of Rochester to play an extremely limited role in determining the education program of the public schools of Rochester.

If this were a strong Mayor city, I would suppose this would be different.

San Diego

Schools in California are a separate political jurisdiction from municipal government, however, what with job development-training and sharing of available tax base make it imperative that the mayor have an ever increasing voice in school decisions.

Toledo

Since assuming office I have not had any of the school "problems" brought to my attention. In Ohio, as I am sure you realize, the Board of Education is an elected body, as is the City Council, which handles school matters. We are cooperating with our schools in the matter of utilization of recreation space and equipment.

Anonymous 1

I would like to point out that in Ohio the school system is not under the jurisdiction of City Mayors or Managers. Rather the administration of a local school district is controlled by a separate school board. Even with this situation, however, it is important that a Mayor take a great deal of interest in the betterment of the educational system.

Anonymous 2

In our city we have a Unified School District which is governed by a Board of Education who are elected by the people for a 4-year term. City Government has no control over the school system.